

Revitalizing and Documenting Denaakk'e (Koyukon Athabascan)

Susan Paskuan

Yukon-Koyukuk School District

Denaakk'e hedohudege'eeh dehoon Denaakk'e hedok'əhdel'eeghenh eslaanh.

Denaanonle ghedehtlne yeł Denaakk'e hedok'əhdel'eeghenh kkaa yeł denaakkenaage' okko kk'ots'edeneeyh. Saakkaay kkaa Denaakk'e hedohedelee.

I am learning our language while I am a teacher.

Our elders and our teachers work on our language. Our children are learning our language.

Thanks to a National Science Foundation fellowship, I was able to take two excellent classes that have contributed to documenting and revitalizing our language. Phil Cash Cash, instructor of the Documentary Filmmaking for Endangered Languages class showed me the technical aspects of filming and making movies, but also the importance of documenting every visual aspect of our language – spoken, body language, and use of space. I am excited about filming our speakers and students from an Indigenous perspective.

The Yukon-Koyukuk School District requires that our language be taught to students in grade K-4. Through the use of video-conferencing we are able to offer this to our rural village schools as a collaborative effort between me in Fairbanks and a certified teacher or paraprofessional on site with the students. This combination of technology and on-site teachers is not optimal, but innovative considering the few speakers who are able to teach.

Jennie DeGroat, instructor of American Indian Language Immersion, skillfully taught us completely in Navajo the symbols, beliefs, and way of Navajo life. We were provided enough comprehensible input to greet each others, ask questions, and sing in Navajo. I was able to immediately put these teaching strategies to use in my video-conference classes. Students are singing, moving around, and conversing in our language at a higher level than previous years. Ms. DeGroat and Terry Curley were able to come to Alaska to teach most of our language instructors.

The hallmark AILDI's micro-teaching requirement reinforces the skills we learn in our classes. It has allowed me to become a more effective language teacher. The reward is hearing our students sing and talk in Denaakk'e.